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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/26/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: KARZAI HOSTS PARLIAMENT-US CONVERSATION ON  
CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

Classified By: CDA Francis Ricciardone for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. President Karzai, his national security ministers, and several dozen MPs urged the Charge and ISAF representatives on April 26 to join with the Afghan government and Parliament to form a commission on reducing civilian casualties. During a long and impassioned but respectful meeting, Karzai and the MPs implored ISAF to improve coordination between Coalition forces and the Afghan government. The Charge expressed his deepest sympathies for the victims of civilian casualty incidents and said the US had received Afghans' messages of concern and anger. MG Joseph Votel, deputy commander of an elite SOF unit, assured Afghans that ISAF had begun integrating Afghan security officials and military counterparts into its operations and had already seen benefits in the new partnership. Most MPs seemed pleased with the dialogue, although a few called for greater restrictions on foreign forces. End Summary.

Emotional, But Respectful Dialogue on Civilian Casualties

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12. (SBU) Karzai invited the Charge and ISAF representatives to meet with more than 50 Members of Parliament, several Cabinet ministers, and Palace advisors to hear Parliament's proposals for reducing civilian casualties and increasing ISAF-Afghan security coordination. There were no media present during the discussion. In a smaller meeting immediately after the larger gathering, Karzai told the Charge the proposed Afghan government-Afghan MPs-ISAF joint commission would help "cool down tempers" among MPs and improve perceptions of Coalition forces among Afghan political leaders. Karzai agreed with one MP's remarks that the US and international community had "built this new Afghan state and democracy from within (since 2001), but now you are trying to destroy it."

13. (SBU) During the larger gathering, MPs urged ISAF to improve its coordination with Afghan security forces and recognize the pain Afghan citizens felt at the killing of innocent civilians. Lower House MP Sayed Mohammed Gulabzoy (Khost, Pashtun) said Khost MPs had been so angered by the tragedy of an April 9 civilian casualty incident in their home province that they were boycotting Parliament sessions until the government showed results in its efforts to win better coordination between ISAF and Afghan forces. Gulabzoy felt Afghan security forces had improved their capacity and skill in recent years and deserved a greater role in military operations aimed at the insurgency. Lower House MP Mawlawi

Ludin (Nangarhar, Pashtun) said Afghans were losing confidence in Coalition forces' ability to provide security with each civilian casualty incident.

14. (SBU) Other MPs offered more pointed comments, criticizing Coalition leaders for not engaging the government sooner on the issue. Upper House MP Mohammed Alam Ezedyar (Panjshir, Tajik) pressed for a formalized agreement on the status of foreign forces in Afghanistan. Ezedyar believed that had such an agreement been in place, ISAF-Afghan cooperation would have begun earlier and some recent civilian casualties could have been avoided. Lower House MP Haji Farid (Kapisa, Pashtun) asked for concrete results to come from the meeting, and implored ISAF to agree to Parliament's proposal for a joint commission. To general appreciation, Lower House MP Sahera Sharif (Khost, Pashtun) stated, "we are glad when you kill Taliban, but do not confuse us with them. They are our enemies, so we are not surprised when they attack and kill us. But we expect much more from the US. This is why we are angry."

#### Charge, ISAF Promise Message Has Been Heard

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15. (SBU) The Charge promised Karzai and MPs that the US recognized the anger and sadness of the Afghan people over accidental civilian casualties. The US did not accept the unacceptable, nor defend the indefensible and was committed to do everything possible to prevent these tragic accidents. The US had heard the MPs' message "loudly and clearly" and would work hard to reduce incidents of civilian casualties. He urged the MPs to recognize the great difference between friends who accept responsibility for dreadful mistakes, and who try to prevent them, versus enemies who deliberately kill and maim Afghans.

16. (SBU) MG Votel expressed his deep regret for the April 9 Khost incident, which killed and wounded family members of Afghan Army Col. Khan, who was present at the meeting. Votel assured MPs that Coalition forces had already begun closer coordination with Afghan security forces. Officials from the Ministries of Defense and Interior, as well as the National Directorate of Security, had joined Coalition forces at

Bagram Air Field to improve coordination. Such enhanced cooperation had already shown results. After the formal session, Ricciardone and Votel personally offered condolences to Col. Khan, as Karzai and MPs witnessed with approval.

#### A Positive Dialogue

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17. (C) Karzai led this discussion with a calm demeanor and less theatrics than he has shown in his recent public statements on civilian casualties. The MPs, too, were generally respectful in their comments to the Charge and ISAF representatives, despite their clear emotional involvement in the issue. Their tone was more sorrowful than angry. MPs did not define the scope, purpose, or authority of their proposed joint commission. MPs from southern and eastern provinces generally want to see stricter controls placed on foreign forces' maneuverability, while northern MPs place a greater value in ISAF's continued, long-term presence in Afghanistan. Karzai staged this discussion deftly to manage both his relations with the US and his domestic political equities. He recommended that further such meetings could serve a positive end by pacifying the vehemently anti-Coalition discussions in Parliament that routinely follow civilian casualty incidents.  
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